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EDITED BY

REGINALD L. POOLE, M.A., Ph.D.

FELLOW OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE AND LECTURER IN DIPLOMATIC IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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THE ENGLISH

HISTORICAL REVIEW

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A Letter by Lord Palmerston on the Egyptian Question of 1840.

The following important letter by Lord Palmerston upon his policy in the Egyptian question of 1840, more especially as regarded his conduct towards France, was addressed to Sir John Cam Hobhouse (afterwards Lord Broughton) on 27 July 1843, and is preserved among the Broughton papers in the British Museum.[1] It is the writer's especial object to vindicate himself from the charge of having acted deceitfully and discourteously towards France by concealing from her the impending signature of the treaty concluded by the other great powers on 15 July 1840, by which she was ousted from the European concert, and the affairs of Egypt and Syria were settled without her participation. The nature of the criticisms to which Lord Palmerston's conduct had been subjected may be gathered from the following passage from the *Annual Register* for 1840 :—

> The Parisian journals were loud in their denunciations against the treachery of England. They said that M. Guizot, their ambassador in London, might at least have been informed of the resolution to make the ultimate convention before it was actually signed. And here, we conceive, there was ground for complaint on the part of France. To say the least, it would have been more courteous towards that great and gallant nation to have avoided even the semblance of a slight. M. Guizot was certainly left in ignorance of the intention to come to the definitive arrangement so immediately, and he declared that he had been deceived in the matter. Perhaps there was no deception in the case, but the more proper course would have been to apprise him that at a given time the convention would be signed whether France consented to it or not, and allow him time to communicate with his government before the signatures of the other plenipotentiaries were affixed to the document.

Lord Palmerston's letter should be read together with other papers relating to the Egyptian question of 1840 published in Lord Dalling and the Hon. Evelyn Ashley's biography of him, vol. ii.

R. Garnett.

C. T.:[2] 27 July 1843.

My dear Hobhouse,—I beg your pardon for not having sooner answered your inquiry about the course we pursued towards France about the Syrian affairs, but I could not do so fully without looking back through the papers laid before Parliament, and somehow or other one's time is so broken in upon every day that it is difficult to find leisure for such a reference.

My general answer to your question is that in the course of the negociations which preceded the Treaty of July I gave France full warning that if she would not join in coercive measures against Mehemet

[1] Add. MS. 36471, f. 211.

[2] Carlton Terrace.

Ali to drive him out of Syria, and if Austria, Russia, and Prussia would, England would go on in company with Austria, Russia, and Prussia, and would not be prevented from doing so by the refusal of France to join. We found, however, in the progress of these negociations that France positively refused to join in these coercive measures, and I found also that France and her coadjutors were setting all engines to work to prevent us from acting. Therefore, when at last the Cabinet came, in the beginning of July 1840, to the determination to conclude a Treaty for action with Austria, Russia, and Prussia without France, and had founded that determination upon the formal decision of France not to take part in such action, I of course did not communicate to Guizot our intention then to conclude that Treaty, because to have done so would have been an act of egregious folly, seeing that there was no possible chance of obtaining the accession of France, but a dead certainty of affording her means and opportunity to defeat our intentions.

Now, taking the papers laid before Parliament, and not going further back than 10 Sept. 1839, you will find a despatch of that date from me to Bulwer giving an account of a conversation I had with Sebastiani, in which I explained to him our plan of coercive measures against Mehemet Ali, which were very nearly the same as those which we carried into execution the year after, and I said that although we were anxious to co-operate with the whole of the other four Powers, yet if all the four could not be persuaded to join us we should be ready to act in concert with a less number than the four, if we had a fair prospect of being able to do so with success. Sebastiani said that this was a very important decision, and implied a separation from France and a dissolution of the Alliance. I denied that such a result would be a necessary consequence of our decision; but I repeated that such would be our course; and, in order that there might be no mistake from any omission of Sebastiani to report what I had said, I desired Bulwer to show Marshal Soult my despatch.

Again, in my despatch to Bulwer of 23 Sept. 1839 I gave him an account of another conversation with Sebastiani, in which I had again intimated to him that if France refused to join us we should go on without her.

In my despatch to Lord Granville, 29 Oct. 1839, I gave a summary of the negociation up to that time, and of the efforts made to induce France to join us, and I again stated the course which we thought necessary for the settlement of the affair in question, and I desired Lord Granville to give Soult a copy of that despatch.

On 12 Dec. 1839 I told Granville that Sebastiani had shown me a despatch to him from Soult, in which Soult said that if the Russian amended proposals, about to be communicated to Brunnow, were not accompanied by any insidious conditions or reserves tending to counteract their ostensible effect, the French Government would in such an altered state of things be prepared to reconsider the whole Turco-Egyptian question, not even excepting those points on which different Governments had, up to that time, taken views so different as to render further negociations upon them apparently useless.

The Russian proposals brought at that time to Brunnow, and which

related to naval and military arrangements to be made for the defence of Turkey, in the event of Ibrahim's advance through Asia Minor towards Constantinople, were perfectly satisfactory; but the French Government did *not* reconsider its former decision, or if it did the result was only to confirm that decision, and 'to render further negociation on the points to which that decision related not only apparently but manifestly hopeless.'

But on 5 Jan. 1840 I informed Sebastiani by a letter from Holland House, laid before Parliament, what was the nature of Brunnow's proposals, and that Austria, Prussia, Russia, and England being agreed, there remained only the concurrence of France wanting for the establishment of a European Concert, and I said we earnestly hoped such concurrence would not be refused us.

The propositions of Brunnow having been approved by the Cabinet, and the concurrence of Austria and Prussia having been signified, I proceeded to draw up a draft of a Treaty between the five Powers in accordance with those propositions, and the object of the Treaty was to get Mehemet out of Syria by persuasion if possible, but by force if persuasion should fail, and Granville's despatch to me of 24 Jan. 1840 contains undeniable proof of my anxiety to obtain the co-operation of France, and of the unreserved confidence with which I treated the French Government. For that despatch records, and from the testimony of the French Government itself, that I had shown to Sebastiani confidentially, for his opinion thereupon, my draft of that Treaty, even before I had submitted that draft to the Cabinet. Both Soult and Louis Philippe said to Granville that they were gratified and obliged by this unequivocal proof of confidence, and they both acknowledged that a great point would be gained for Europe if Russia could be persuaded to abandon her claim to a separate Protectorship of Turkey, and would sign in conjunction with the other four Powers a Treaty for maintaining the independence of the Porte; but both seemed to doubt that the Emperor would agree to pursue such a course; Granville, however, adds in his confidential despatch of 27 Jan. 1840 that nothing fell from Louis Philippe which led him to think that France would be a party to coercive measures against Mehemet Ali, although such measures constituted the very essence of the proposed Treaty; but, on the contrary, the French king restated to Granville all the reasons and difficulties which in his opinion made it impossible for France to become a party to such measures.

Soon after this Sebastiani was recalled, and recalled very suddenly, and Guizot was appointed to succeed him. The change may have been occasioned by considerations of domestic convenience in France; but it did so happen that Sebastiani was sincerely anxious to maintain the integrity and independence of Turkey, and did not care a straw for Mehemet Ali; and that Guizot was heart and soul for Mehemet Ali, and did not care much about the dignity and independence of the Turkish Empire.

On 10 Feb. 1840 Granville in a despatch to me records that he had at my request urged Soult not to leave us without a French ambassador, with whom I might communicate in regard to the negociation then going on, and Guizot was soon afterwards sent over, but did not actually arrive till the beginning of March.

In the meantime, however, and on 9 March, Granville wrote me a despatch in which, giving an account of a conversation with Thiers, he said that Thiers told him that even if the English and French Governments should not be able to agree as to the measures to be pursued in the Turco-Egyptian question *their disagreement would not affect the friendly relations between the two countries.*

On 12 March 1840 I wrote a long despatch to Granville, giving him an account of a conversation which I had had with Guizot, and from which anybody who reads the despatch will see that it was manifest that France was determined not to be a party to any measure of coercion against Mehemet Ali. But it being at that time uncertain whether Thiers, who had become Minister in France, would be able to maintain himself, that uncertainty was made a pretext by Thiers for gaining time, by withholding from Guizot any positive or decisive instructions upon the matter under negociation.

But though Guizot said he was without instructions, yet Thiers, in a conversation with Granville, which Granville reported in a despatch of 13 March 1840, said that France *refused* to be a party to coercive measures against Mehemet Ali, and gave his reasons for so refusing, and added that it was *impossible for any Ministry in France*, however composed, to act hostilely against Egypt for the purpose of restoring the Pashalic to the direct authority of the Porte; and a direct attack upon Egypt was one of the means of coercion which in case of need we had proposed to resort to.

On 3 April 1840 Granville stated that no change was to be expected in the views and conduct of the French Government in regard to the proposed measures against Mehemet Ali; and that even if Austria, Prussia, Russia, and England should remain firm to their purpose they must despair of inducing the French Government to agree even to the *general principles* laid down by those four Powers, and Granville adds that he is every day more and more convinced, and so are all his diplomatic colleagues, that France will not join in hostile measures to compel Mehemet Ali to evacuate Syria, whatever may be the party who may form the Government.

On 15 April 1840 Granville again repeats, with reference to a speech delivered by Thiers in favour of Mehemet Ali in the House of Peers, his conviction that no Ministry which could be formed in France would agree to adopt coercive measures against Mehemet Ali.

So far, however, this belief of Granville has rested only on his own conviction and on the opinion of his colleagues, and on statements made by Thiers and Louis Philippe in official conversations; but we put the matter to a more stringent test. To prove our anxiety to conceal nothing from France, and to carry France entirely along with us, we, the other four Powers, proposed to France to establish here in London a formal Conference of the five Powers to consider and determine what measures should be adopted on the Turco-Egyptian affair; and on 17 April 1840 Granville informed me by a despatch of that date that, *Thiers being a party to such a Conference*, and upon the specific ground that if in such a Conference four Powers out of the five—that is, Austria, Prussia, Russia, and England—should decide to drive Mehemet Ali out of

Syria, *France would refuse to be a party to such measures*, and her refusal to join in such measures after she had been a party to such a Conference would render her separation from the other Powers a more marked step than it would be if no such Conference of the five were to take place.

But it may be said that France hoped and expected that her refusal to join the other four Powers would prevent them from acting without her, and that we here in London had misled Guizot into such an expectation. This, however, is contradicted by my despatch to Granville of 5 Aug. 1840, in which, giving him an account of a conversation I had had with Guizot about the naval armaments of France, I said that Guizot read me a despatch from Thiers, in which Thiers said that whenever France should acquire the certainty that she would not be left alone by the other four Powers on the Turco-Egyptian question the French Government would make certain changes in the state of their navy afloat—a proof that at that time Thiers and Guizot considered it possible that France might be so left alone.

In my subsequent communication with Guizot I found that France was unchangeably determined not to join in any coercive measures against Mehemet Ali, and therefore I recommended to the Cabinet, and the Cabinet determined, that the four Powers should go on without France.

Of course, as I have already said, we were not weak enough to inform Guizot that we were going on a given day to sign a Convention, nor did we show him the draft of that Convention, because, as we knew beyond a doubt that the French Government would not and could not be a party to that Convention, but would, on the contrary, employ all the means in its power to prevent us, the four Powers, from concluding it, we should by any such communication have certainly defeated our own purpose. But I happen to know that Guizot was so well informed of our general intentions that not a fortnight before we signed the Treaty he wrote to Thiers that such a Treaty would in all probability be signed by the four Powers and the Porte, and that Thiers might expect to hear of its conclusion any day of the week. A day or two before 15 July Guizot was indeed misled by Madame Lieven, who, in trying to pump Bulow, was overreached herself, and, in consequence of what she said to Guizot, Guizot wrote to Thiers to say that the danger had passed over for the moment, and that some further time must elapse before the Treaty could be signed.

The great object, in fact, of France then was to gain time, because if operations were not begun in Syria before the end of October they could not commence till the next spring; and if the French Government could by negociation have spun matters out till the time of year when orders sent from hence would not have reached the coast of Syria in time for operations in 1840, they reckoned for certain that before the spring of 1841 something or other would happen to enable them to divide the four Powers, and to patch up an arrangement that would have left Mehemet Ali in possession of Syria and a pressing candidate for nominal independence under the protection of France. This calculation of the French Government was perfectly well founded, and it was the signal frustration

of such rational expectations which excited such uncontrollable fury from one end of France to the other.

I have gone into a much longer detail than you expected when you asked the question to which this is a reply, but you will see from what I have said in this letter that a simple yes or no would not have been a sufficient answer.

My dear Hobhouse,
Yours sincerely,
PALMERSTON.

Sir John Hobhouse, Bart.

The state of the case may in a few words be said to be that as long as we had a hope that France would act with us we treated her with unlimited confidence; and that when at last we found it certain that she would not act with us we did not think it prudent to let her into our counsels, for fear she should thwart us by intriguing in Europe and by sending information to Egypt.

The Campaign on the Sutlej, 1845–6.

PROFESSOR MOORE SMITH, in the October number of the *English Historical Review*, prints a letter of Sir Harry Smith which explains Sir Harry's statement, in his autobiography, that the movement of Sir Hugh Gough's army from Arufka to Boutawallah, on 12 Jan. 1846, was the result of a suggestion made by himself. In the same letter he accuses Sir Hugh Gough of abandoning combination and strategy, because the British army was posted opposite the enemy's right instead of his centre, and he claims the credit of having saved the army from this dangerous situation. On 3 Jan. he wrote to the governor-general, Sir Henry Hardinge, explaining his view of the case, and stating that he had explained it to the commander-in-chief (Sir Hugh Gough) that morning. At some period thereafter he sent a statement of his proposed distribution to Sir Hugh, and 'in forty-eight hours it was adopted.'

Mr. Moore Smith's inferences are quite natural from the sources of information which alone were accessible to him, but it seems clear, from the correspondence of Hardinge and Gough (which I have before me), that Smith completely misunderstood (1) the reasons for placing the army at Arufka, (2) the reason of the movement on 12 Jan. (nine days after the date of his letter), and (3) the importance of the distribution sent in by himself to Sir Hugh Gough at some date between the 3rd and the 12th (presumably on the 10th, if his recollection about 'forty-eight hours' is accurate). Since the date of the battle of Ferozshah, Gough and Hardinge had been fully conscious of the difficulties of the situation, including the possibility of an attack from the enemy.